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PSCI 550.01: Approaches to Political Theory

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**University of Montana
Department of Political Science**

Political Science 550
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Fall 2015
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**Political Theory Seminar:
Approaches to Political Theory**

Course Description:

Beginning in the late 1950s, many commentators wondered whether political theory (or political philosophy—I shall not distinguish between them), as it had been traditionally practiced and taught, was “in abeyance.” Whether we have reached ‘*the end of political theory*,’ is a question that continues to plague political theorists. Political theory’s impending demise is, however, complicated by the fact that political theorists have never agreed to what it is they do, or should be doing, and their disagreements affect the way they approach political questions. But rather than rehashing an old debate, one that resurrects what John Gunnell has called ‘the myth of the tradition of political theory,’ perhaps we ought to consider applying a different conceptual framework for understanding political theory, one that does *not* focus on the causes that political theorists have championed or condemned, or on how political theory has been affected by specific events (real or imagined). Instead, I propose this semester that we raise an even more fundamental question: *what is the purpose of political inquiry?* A fundamental question precisely because what people take to be the purpose of political theory determines what they study, who they study, and how they study it.

Course Objectives: after successfully completing the course work, the student should be able to:

1. Distinguish between a normative, a scientific/historical, and an analytical approaches, and recognize how political theorists often combine each of these approaches in their work.
2. Develop concise, analytic essays on the assigned readings. Specifically with regards to an analytic perspective, students will consider their own position with respect to different approaches to studying political theory (for instance, what consequences follow when one emphasizes text over context when studying political theory?)
3. Evaluate a political theory in terms of its analytic, empirical, and normative claims, and its strengths and/or weaknesses.

Course Grading:

PS 550 will be taught as a seminar. Short essays of **4-5** double-spaced pages (about **6 essays** per student) will be assigned and critiqued in class (50% of course grade.) Class participation (20% of course grade) will be evaluated according to each student's contribution to discussions on reading assignments. The final paper (30%) will be **12-15** pages.

In addition, students will be expected to assess the merits and weaknesses of their colleague's essays. To give us time to prepare questions, copies of your essay must be distributed before you are scheduled to orally present it (please see schedule). Late essays will not be accepted. Each **Political Science M.A. graduate student** must also complete a political theory field exam. All students will complete a take-home final. **The final & field exams will be take home & due on Friday, December 18th by 12pm.**

Accessibility and Students with Disabilities

The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction by supporting collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students. If you have a disability that requires accommodation, please present the instructor with a letter from Disability Services for Students (DDS), Lommasson Center 154 (243-2243), indicating the existence of a disability and suggested accommodations.

The instructor has attempted to make all course materials accessible. If you find course material that has barriers to accessibility, please notify the instructor as soon as possible so the oversight can be corrected as quickly as possible.

Required Tests:

Joseph Wood Krutch, **THE MODERN TEMPER**

Leo Strauss, **NATURAL RIGHT & HISTORY**

B.F. Skinner, **BEYOND FREEDOM & DIGNITY**

Erich Fromm, **ESCAPE FROM FREEDOM**

John Gunnell, **POLITICAL THEORY & INTERPRETATION**

Isaiah Berlin, **LIBERTY**

Wendell Barry, **SEX, ECONOMY, FREEDOM & COMMUNITY**

Arendt, **THE HUMAN CONDITION**

M. Ignatieff, **THE NEEDS OF STRANGERS**

* Classical works of: Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Machiavelli, Locke, Burke, Rousseau, Hobbes, J.S. Mill, Marx—to be assigned on an individual basis.

John Rawls, **POLITICAL LIBERALISM** selected readings

Quentin Skinner, **VISIONS OF POLITICS**, selected readings

September 1st

Introduction to the Course: Approaches to Political Theory

Read: Andrew Hacker, “Capital and Carbuncles: The ‘Great Books’ Reappraised,” *American Political Science Review*, (September 1954): 775-786; Alfred Cobban, “The Decline of Political Theory,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 68, no. 3 (September 1953), 321-337

Recommended Readings:

Judith N. Shklar’s *After Utopia: the Decline of Political Faith*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957.

September 8th

Slack Day: Prepare Essays & Readings

September 15th

“Classical” & “Theory & Justice-Seeking: Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas

Review: Plato’s *Republic*, Aristotle’s *Politics*, St Augustine’s *City of God*, St. Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on Law*, *Summa Theologica*, Questions 90-97, Rousseau’s *The Social Contract, or Principles of Political Right*, and Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*.

Essays (due 9/10 by 1pm): Please describe what constitutes ‘justice’ for one of these theorists, and how and where does he suggest we might find a standard of justice? Taking his work as one example, what do it suggest are some characteristics of a justice-seeking approach in classical theory?

September 22nd

'Modern' Justice-Seeking & Knowledge-seeking: Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Burke, Rousseau, J.S. Mill, Marx

Review: Machiavelli's *The Prince*, Hobbes' *Leviathan*, Locke's *Two Treatises on Government*, Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, J.S. Mill's *On Liberty*, and Marx's *Communist Manifesto*.

Essays (due 9/17): Please describe *what* constitutes 'knowledge' for one of these theorists, and *how* and *where* does he suggest we might gain political knowledge? Taking his work as one example, what do it suggest are some characteristics of a knowledge-seeking approach in "modern" theory?

Essays (due 9/17): Please describe what constitutes 'justice' for one of these theorists, and how and where do they find this justice? Please identify at what point the theorist shift from questions of 'justice-seeking' to questions of 'knowledge-seeking'?

September 29th

Strauss: the Conservative Justice-seeker?

Read: Strauss, *Natural Right & History*; **Choose one of the recommended readings as well.**

Essays (due 9/24): What for Strauss is the purpose of political theory? According to Strauss, what is 'historicism' and how has it harmed political theory? What does he identify as genuine "justice-seeking" and what does it assume about meaning & nature of justice?

Essays (due 9/24): Jeffery Hart lists one variety of conservative thought as "Natural law conservatism," which deduces principles of behavior from the fact of 'human' nature as distinct from other kinds of nature, and on that account resists moral change based on fashion, historical accident, or false analogies between human nature and other kinds. Conservatism of this kind, he thinks, "is found in Aristotle, Aquinas, Burke, and today in *Leo Strauss* (italics added.) In light of your reading, discuss this statement.

Essays (due 9/24): It's argued that today Republican neo-conservatives are students of Leo Strauss especially in foreign affairs. In what sense, can we say they understand and/or misunderstand Strauss's conception of "natural right"?

Recommended Readings:

Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*

Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?*, see title chapter

"Strauss, Philosophy, and Politics," (Symposium) *Political Theory*, August 1987

***Rothman, Stanley, 'The Revival of Classical Political Philosophy: A Critique,' *The American Political Science Review*, 56 (June 1962), 341-52.

Herbert Storing (ed.) *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics*

A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*

Ernest Fortin, "Gadamer on Strauss," *Interpretation*, Jan. 1984

Shadia Drury, *The Political Ideas of Leo Strauss* (1988)

Drury, *Leo Strauss and the American Right* (1997);

George Bruce Smith, "Leo Strauss and the Straussians: An Anti-democratic Cult?", *PS: Political Science & Politics*, vol. 3 No. 2 (June 1997);

Seymour Hersh, "Selective Intelligence," *The New Yorker*, 12 May 2003;
David Schaefer, "The Legacy of Leo Strauss: A Bibliographic Introduction,"
The Intercollegiate Review, Summer 1974: 139-148.

October 6th

Liberal Justice-Seeking

Read: J.W. Krutch, *The Modern Temper*, **Choose one of the recommended reading as well;** and **Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, lecture I all; lecture II all; lecture IV all; lecture VI, §6-7; lecture VIII, §3-5, §13-14**

Essays (due 10/1): What does Krutch's account of modern art, modern science and modern knowledge suggest about human dignity? Does it make sense, according to Krutch, to speak of individual "freedom" or "rights" or "justice" given what we've learned from *modern* science, history, and philosophy?

Essays (due 10/1): Rawls could be characterized as the contemporary theorist and a 'liberal justice-seeker.' How does his form of justice-seeking contrast with, say, a Plato or a Marx?

Essays (due 10/1): 'Krutch is a liberal thinker, but he is not wholly embrace a 'negative' conception of freedom (why not?); therein, also lies the source of his modern despair.' Discuss.

Recommended Readings:

Cowley, *Exile's Return*, 1959

Diggins, *Up From Communism: Conservative Odyssey In American Intellectual History*, 1975

Frankel, *The Case for Modern Man*, 1955

Grey, "Modern Liberalism & Despair, The Pilgrimage of J.W. Krutch,"
American Studies, Spring 1997

Goodwin, *The Lottery State*

Perry, "The Modern Distemper," *Saturday Review of Literature*, June 1929

Kateb, *Utopia & Its Enemies*, 1963

Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*

Margolis, *Joseph Wood Krutch: A Writer's Life*, 1980

Nash, *The Nervous Generation: American Thought, 1917-1930*, 1970

Slater, "The Negative Secularism of The Modern Temper: Joseph Wood Krutch, *American Quarterly*, Summer 1981

October 13th

Justice Seeking & Empirical Inquiry: Scientific Approach

Read: B.F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*; **Choose one recommended reading below.**

Essays (due 10/8): Is Skinner a political theorist?, and if he is, what makes him so?

Essays (due 10/8): What claims (findings/hypothesis/laws/arguments) does Skinner make that may be called scientific? What claims (etc.) does he make that he calls scientific, but are anything but?

Essays (due 10/8): If Skinner had his way, we would have no alternative but to choose between science and democracy. Is this a valid choice? Why, why not?

Recommended Readings:

- J. Weinberger, "Science and Rule in Bacon's Utopia: An Introduction to The Reading of the *New Atlantis*," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 70 (September 1976): 865-85
- Steven Smith, "Political Science and Political Philosophy: An Uneasy Relation," *PS: Political Science and Politics*, vol. 33 (June 2000): 189-91
- William O'Donohue, and Kyle Ferguson, *The Psychology of B.F. Skinner*, 2001

October 20th

Justice Seeking & Empirical Inquiry cont.

Read: Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*; **Choose one of the recommended readings as well.**

Essays (due 10/15): "What is good or bad for man is not a metaphysical question, but an empirical one that can be answered on the basis of an analysis of man's nature and the effect which certain conditions have on him." (266 -*Escape From Freedom*) What difficulties are involved in making an "empirical" view of human nature the basis of a political theory?

Essays (due 10/15): Both Fromm and B.F. Skinner seek "a science of man," but they mean very different things by it. Discuss with reference to what each thinker hopes such a "science" will achieve for society (for us?)

Essays (due 10/15): Fromm, in common with other writers on the left, has a concept of alienation. What is it? Has the concept of alienation become outdated, too blunt for an analytical tool?

Recommended Readings:

- Richard Ashcraft, "Political Theory and the Problem of Ideology," *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 42, no. 3 (August 1980): 687-705.
- Bartlett & Schodall, "Fromm, Marx, and the Concept of Alienation," *Science and Society*, Summer 1963
- Fromm, *Man For Himself; Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*
- Kariel, "The Normative Pattern of Erich Fromm's *Escape From Freedom*," *Journal of Politics*, vol. 19, 1957
- Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*
- Schaar, *Escape From Authority: The Perspectives of Erich Fromm*, 1961
- Wells, *The Failure of Psychoanalysis: From Freud to Fromm*, 1963
- Briggs, "From Slaves to Robots," *New Statesman and Nation*, 23 June 1956
- Burston, *The Legacy of Erich Fromm*, 1991
- Ellul, *The Political Illusion; The Technological Society*
- H.P. "The Insane Society," *Dissent*, vol. 3, Winter 1956
- Spitz, "The Appeal to the Right Man," in *Democracy and the Challenge of Power*, 1958
- Sykes, "The Americanization of Erich Fromm," *The Hidden Remnant*, 1962

October 27th

Wendell Berry & Conservative Justice-Seeking

Read: Wendell Berry, *Sex Economy, Freedom & Community*; ***Choose one of the recommended readings as well.***

Essays (due 10/22): “There are two kinds of freedom: the freedom of the community and the freedom of the individual. The freedom of the community is the more fundamental and the more complex.” What Berry understands here, liberal theorists take for granted or deny. Discuss

Essays (due 10/22): Both Fromm (see his *Sane Society*) and Berry associate ‘justice-seeking’ with identifying a ‘genuine’ community of citizens. They do not, however, necessarily agree on what constitutes a genuine community. Compare and contrast what for each of them characterizes a genuine community, and what benefits they claim that an individual gains from living in it.

Essays (due 10/22): Is it Arendt or Berry who most closely follows Aristotle’s teachings regarding human nature, politics, and virtue ethics?

Recommended Readings:

W. Berry, *What Are People For*

Lewis Mumford, *The Human Condition*

November 3rd

Arendt’s Justice-seeking Inquiry into Political Theory

Read: Arendt, *The Human Condition*; ***Choose one recommended reading below.***

Essays (due 10/29): Arendt argues that in the beginning of the modern period, work had displaced both contemplation and action in the hierarchy of men’s activities; but by the nineteenth century labour had replaced work as the supreme activity. How did this triumph of *animal laborans* come about according to Arendt?

Essays (due 10/29): What would Leo Strauss make of Arendt’s interpretation of the ancient Greek polis and the distinction between private and public activities? Would he find the notion of “classical natural right” in her analysis of ‘vita activa’? Would Strauss accept her diagnosis of ‘world alienation’? Why, why not?

Essays (due 10/29): What would Quentin Skinner make of Arendt’s interpretation of the ancient Greek polis? Would he find that her account of the ancient Greek notions of labor, work, and action prone to certain analytic &/or empirical weaknesses? Explain

Recommended Reading:

Special Issue on Hannah Arendt, *Social Research*, 1977

Kateb, "Freedom & Worldliness in the Thought of Hannah Arendt, " *Political Theory*, Spring 1977

Kateb, *Hannah Arendt*

Canovan, "The Contradictions of Hannah Arendt's Political Thought," *Political Theory*, February 1978

Levin, "On Animal Laborans and Homo Politics in Arendt, *Political Theory*, November 1979
 Arendt, *On Revolution*
 Between Past and Future
 The Life of the Mind
 Young-Bruehl, "Reflections on Hannah Arendt's Life of the Mind," *Political Theory*, May 1982
 Whitfield, *Into The Dark: Arendt and Totalitarianism*
 Dallmayr, "Ontology of Freedom," *Political Theory*, May 1984
 Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*
 Raaflaub, "Democracy, Oligarchy and the Concept of the Free Citizen in Late Fifth Century Athens," *Political Theory*, November 1983
 Canovan, "A Case of Distorted Communications," *Political Theory*, February 1983

November 10th

Arendt's Justice-seeking Inquiry cont.
Read: *The Human Condition*

Essays (due 11/5): How does Arendt's distinction between public and private relate to her distinction between work and labor. . .or does it?

Essays (due 11/5): What do you see as the analytical weaknesses of Arendt's *distinction between public and private*? On the other hand, what do you find are the strengths of her distinction?

Essays (due 11/5): Evidently, Arendt embraces a 'positive' conception of freedom. In fact, she suggests a distinction between 'freedom' and 'liberty.' How does this distinction relate to her notion of private and public realms? According to Arendt, what constitutes "true liberty"?

Recommended Readings:

Emily Hauptmann, "A Local History of 'The Political,'" *Political Theory*, vol. 32, no. 1 (February 2004): 34-60.
 Pitkin, "Justice: On Relating Private and Public," *Political Theory*, August 1981

November 17th

Post-Modern Feminism & Arendt

Read: Mary Dietz, "Hannah Arendt & Feminist Politics," in *Feminist Interpretations & Political Theory*, eds. Shanley & Pateman*; Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought*, "Postmodern Feminism;" *Feminists Theorize the Political, eds. Judith Butler & Joan Scott; ***Choose one of the recommended readings as well.***

Essays (due 11/12): How might a "post-modernist" feminist critique Arendt?

Essays (due 11/12): What, if anything, would a feminist theorist find useful in Arendt's analysis?

Essays (due 11/12): Can feminist political theory avoid assuming "a privileged epistemological perspective" or a generalized "female" freedom in society? Explain. If not, what are the consequences?

Recommended Readings:

Michele Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis*

Ann Bookmann & Sandra Morgan, *Women & the Politics of Empowerment*

Nancy Chodrow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*

Zillah Eisenstein, *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism Capitalist*

Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*

Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*

Susan Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought*

Hanna Pitkin, "Food & Freedom in *The Founder*," *Political Theory*, 12, 1984

November 24th

Quentin Skinner & Historical Inquiry in Political Theory

Read: Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, 2004 (available as ebook at UM library webpage) *Regarding Method*, vol. 1, Chaps. 3-4; *Renaissance Virtues*, vol. 2, Chaps. 6-7.

Essays (due 11/19): What does Quentin Skinner suggest is purpose of studying political theory? What does he find wrong with the justice-seeking and analytical approaches? Please describe Quentin Skinner's *historical* approach to political theory. What are its strengths and weakness?

Essays (due 11/19): Does he avoid blending his historical approach with justice-seeking into his own studies of Machiavelli? What 'analytical' problems to you find in his interpretation of Machiavelli's political ideas?

Recommended Readings:

Q. Skinner, "The Ideological Context of Hobbes's Political Thought," *The Historical Journal*, vol. 9, 1966: 286-317.

Q. Skinner, "Meaning & Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History & Theory*, vol. 8, 1969: 3-53.

Q. Skinner, "Inside Story: Rev. of Isaiah Berlin, 'Against the Current'," *New Statesman*, 9 June 1979, 830-1.

John Dunn, "The Identity of the History of Ideas," *Philosophy*, vol. 43: 85-104.

K.R. Massingham, "Skinner is as Skinner does," *Politics*, vol 16: 124-9.

Kari Palonen, "The History of Concepts as a Style of Political Theorizing: Quentin Skinner's and Reinhart Koselleck's Subversion of Normative Political Theory," *European Journal of Political Theory*, vol.1, 2002: 96-111.

Kari Palonen, *Quentin Skinner, History, Politics, Rhetoric*, Cambridge: Polity-Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

Bhikhu Perekh & R.N. Berki, "The History of Political Ideas: A Critique of Q. Skinner's Methodology," *Journal for the History of Ideas*, vol. 34, 1973: 163-84.

J.G.A. Pocock, "Reconstructing the Traditions: Quentin Skinner's Historians' History of Political Thought," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, vol. 3, 1979: 95-113.

Melvin Richter, "Reconstructing the History of Political Languages: Pocock, Skinner and Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe," *History and Theory* vol. 29, 1990: 38-70.

James Tully ed. *Meaning & Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics*, Cambridge: Polity, 1988.

December 1st

Analytical Inquiry & the Critical Critic: Isaiah Berlin

Read: Berlin, "Introduction" and "Two Concepts of Liberty"; Supreme Court case: *Colorado v. Connelly* (1986); T.H. Green, "Liberal Legislation," in *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984, pp. 194-212. Choose one of the recommended readings as well.

Essays (due Mon. 11/30 by 12pm): Essays: How do the opinions in *Colorado v. Connelly* (1986) illustrate the tensions between negative and positive freedom? How would you have ruled in the case, and why?

Essays (due 11/30 by 12pm): Berlin's contribution to our understanding of freedom, as many have noted, is to demonstrate the error of assimilating liberty to morality, and of supposing that morality forms 'a coherent system.'

Essays (due 11/30 b 12pm): "What we mean by freedom makes sense only when viewed against a background of more and less significant purposes." What does T.H. Green mean, and is he correct?

Recommended Readings:

Zygmunt Bauman, *Freedom*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

Crowder, G. "Negative and Positive Liberty, *Political Science*, Dec. 1988

John Gray, *Isaiah Berlin*, Princeton: PUP, 1996.

Kristjansson, K. "What Is Wrong with Positive Liberty?," *Social Theory and Practice*, Fall 1992

S. Hayman, "Positive and Negative Liberty," *Chicago-Kent Law Review*, 1992.

Gerald MacCallum, "Negative and Positive Freedom," reprinted in David Miller's *Liberty*, Oxford: OUP, 1993, pp. 100-122.

Judith Shklar, "Positive Liberty, Negative Liberty in the United States," in *Redeeming American Political Thought*, Chicago: Chicago UP, 1998.

December 8th

Analytical Inquiry & Contemporary Theory: Cautious Justice-seeking?

Read: M. Ignatieff, *The Needs of Strangers* & John Gunnell, *Political Theory & Interpretation*; **Choose one of the recommended readings below.**

Essays (due 12/3): While are the key characteristics do you find in Gunnell analytical approach to political theory? What, if any, kind of 'justice' or moral values can be derived from his theory?

Essays (due 12/3): Ignatieff appears to move between all three approaches to political inquiry. How so? Also what kind of 'justice' does Ignatieff appear to be seeking and where does he propose we look for it?

Recommended Readings:

John Gunnell, "Desperately Seeking Wittgenstein," *European Journal of Political Theory*, vol 3, no. 3, (January 2004): 77-98.

Marc Stears, "The Vocation of Political Theory," *European Journal of Political Theory*, vol. 4, no. 4 (October 2005) 325-350.

George Sabine, "What is a Political Theory," *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 1, no. 1 (February 1939): 1-16.

Sheldon Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 63, no. 4 (December 1969): 1062-1082.

Judith Shklar, "Review." *Political Theory*, vol. 1, no 15 (February 1987).